

## Social Life of Orpheus Imagery: Constructing and Negotiating National Identity<sup>1</sup>

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### *Abstract*

It is a truism today that antiquities are valuable resource of symbolic capital of the modern nations. Therefore in many research fields a strong focus can be seen on the uses/abuses of the past in constructing national identity of the “imagined community” of the nation. I isolate the figure of Orpheus whose Thracian-ness fuelled “the grand national narrative” in Bulgaria, in the last few decades. It is studied in the context of the shared, connected, and entangled history of the Balkans produced by Bulgarian, Romanian and Greek scholars. Their valuable reflexive and critical studies of the usable past are fruitful for the development of new perspectives in the academic space. The “eye of anthropology” gives priority to cultural phenomena and makes it possible to evaluate these imageries as cultural products in specific contexts. They are embedded through different media in everyday life which produce a number of representations – municipality emblems, narratives, films, monuments of the fabricated “national hero”.

**Keywords:** antiquities, symbolic capital, national identity, nature of sources, limits of interpretations, management of origins, everyday life, banalized nationalism.

### 1. Introduction

This article focuses on Orpheus imagery as a *case study* of the uses of images and symbols from the past which play powerful role in the present. Along with archaeological finds most often interpreted by ancient Greek imageries these symbols flag national identities legitimizing modern territorial boundaries and their ethnic realities. Therefore the focus on the figure of Orpheus is not a study on Orpheus *per se*, but on the dominant lines of its representations in antiquity as resource of historical tradition and cultural capital of the nation. Since the 1940s there is a strong focus on the uses/abuses of the past in constructing national identity of the “imagined community” of the nation. B. Anderson opened up new possibilities for anthropological studies of different nationalisms producing valuable insights. In the 1990s a burgeoning corpus of research on ethnicity, cultural identities and politics appeared revealing their strong impact on the field of archaeology and classical studies. Thus it appeared that nationalism is the context in which

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ancient symbols – archaeological materiality and mythic figures – played considerable role in the political and cultural realities accepted by the people (Meskell, 1998). The active role of the past in everyday life therefore is an important research field. This kind of studies reconsiders the boundaries between science, society and academia.

I tried to isolate the imagery of Orpheus and its Thracian-ness as it fuelled “the grand national narrative” in Bulgaria in the last few decades. It is so imbedded in the popular imagination of the Bulgarians today that the Greek venturing to use the image of Orpheus is considered to be a misused claim. Popular assumptions are “defended” by academics who appeal to the state to protect culture-historical heritage from foreign encroachments. Orpheus has acquired the image of ancestor of the Bulgarians (Marinov, 2012; Lazova, 2016). The “social drama” arising out of groups committed to common history and sharing common values or interests is concerned with the question “whose is Orpheus”.

It turned out however that Orpheus cannot be isolated from the context of the shared, connected, and entangled history of the Balkans revealed in the critical and reflexive studies of the usable past (Daskalov & Vezekov, 2015). The imagery of Orpheus is a sample for tracing in a “longue durée” perspective the process of its becoming a national hero in Bulgaria. This is a perspective which reveals the figure as relational and produced with different scales of intensity (Todorova, 2015). It makes sense of different genealogies of the national(ist) programs on the Balkans and the logic of the asymmetric development of their discourses.

## 2. Heritage and the past: Theoretical lines

The progress made by the historical sciences in their cooperation with the social sciences leads to some fundamental understandings: any historical totality – in this case the mythical entity of the Thracians and their Orpheus – is not self-evident. The question is how this totality or entity is achieved? What kind of knowledge is obtained, who needs this knowledge. And something more important is to underline an enormously significant but often unappreciated distinction between “heritage” and the past. Heritage is by its nature a social activity embedded in a changing contemporary context – an ever changing array of objects and symbols, a complex mosaic of artifacts, images, monuments and customs that demand to receive meaning. The past in contrast to heritage is one of the most virtual realities. We can never recreate the past as it actually was (Ranke). We can only create our discourse which is filtering the facts and is arranging them in a harmonized usable totality. We can only speculate on the human “essence” of past culture by piecing their surviving tangible and intangible fragments together with the glue of our emotions – this glue comes from the hopes, fears, ideologies of the time in which we live. This glue creates the inspiration of the modern nation builders who are in general scholars dealing with the past (Lowenthal, 1985; Silberman, 2015). This understanding leads us to the contemporary reflexivity in the research which focuses on the appropriation of the past by the historiographies of the modern nation-states. The past represented by historians and archaeologists attracted the popular imagination mainly concerning the deep roots and ethnic origins proving our “ownership” over the past.

## 3. The nature of sources: Limits of interpretation and beyond

The greatest challenge in this *case study* is the nature of sources. From one side, Orpheus imagery and its Thracian-ness is represented by ancient Greeks among many other associations of his origin with other places. From the other side, it is lacking indigenous written source material or native literary accounts of the Thracians. Their customs therefore are viewed through Greek eyes. Most ancient writers discuss peripheral regions only incidentally (no participant observation) when involved in diplomatic policy. The authors neither understood nor

spoke the native languages therefore any interpretation of native customs or institutions is filtered through the Greek notion of otherness. The Greek and Roman accounts of the Thracian life are product of different setting with its own interests (Archibald, 1998).

The Thracian-ness of Orpheus is the Greek association with a geographical space called by them “Thrace”. “Thrace” is a geographical expression the meaning of which depends on speaker’s perspective. Since the mid-1980s maps are treated as value-laden images which are able to represent the existing social stratifications, economic order or cultural conventions in a given period. Thus the physical extent is infused with social intent (Guentcheva, 2005). Therefore problems of origins, continuity or national unity are supposed to be associated with geographic dimensions. The unity of space called ancient Thrace is imagined by the geographical mythology within the frame of the national discourse. All geographic definitions of this territory filled with multifarious *ethne* are given in different times imagined by a range of representative Greek and Roman authors describing it as their “otherness” (Marinov, 2015: 15). Claims to shared ancestry and territory constitute a discourse that may or may not have any relationship to an “objective” reality. Therefore, the geographic space – ancient and modern – has fluid limits whose boundaries differ in different contexts and contents and have to be constantly defined and redefined. It is important to note also that any geographic discovery is going hand in hand with simultaneous invention of the region – the two processes are in fact inseparable. The discovery of a place puts the important question how people deal with differences (Todorova, 1997: 116).

The study of ethnicity in the ancient Mediterranean has experienced a radical revision in recent years. It becomes clear that the 19<sup>th</sup> century *blood-and-soil* primordial models of ethnic groups are used successfully mostly in political debates – usually nationalistic. Today ethnicity is increasingly modeled as an instrumentalist discursive identity to which an individual may or may not ascribe. As for the Thracians we are not able to understand their own identification.

The seminal texts known from Herodotus – the earliest prose source – couple *Orphikoi* with *Bakhikoi* and *Pythagoreioi* (2.81) and *Zalmoxis, Pythagoras and the Getai* (Hist. 4.94-96) and supply us with the fundamental knowledge about the “otherness” of the Thracians. Scholars consider however that there is no obvious way of subtracting from such isolated texts what might have been non-Greek, i.e. Thracian (Archibald, 1999: 427-469). These early Greek speculations enter a number of heterogeneous and isolated texts from different periods and are used uncontrolled to shape the needed imagery of Orpheus. Ancient texts represent the “otherness” by several categories of Thracians the most usable of them being the association with the typical Greek cliché about the barbarian “alien wisdom”. It is represented by the mythical singer Orpheus and by some concomitant figures as the Geta Zalmoxis who preached that nobody actually dies (Marinov, 2015: 15). Provided the nature of sources it might be established an enormous deficiency in the knowledge about Thracians. This fact presupposes the fabrication of a number of hypothetical constructions which are mobilized in different contexts to serve different national ideologies. The “eye of anthropology” (Appadurai, 1996) gives priority to cultural phenomena and therefore makes possible to evaluate these imageries as cultural products of the “imagined community”. They have to be understood within a cultural matrix and mainly as consumption of signs (Featherstone, 2007; Lazova, forthcoming).

The deficiency in the knowledge about the image of Orpheus in Greek literary tradition is complicated by the lack of “domestic” Thracian epigraphic and iconic monuments (Rabadjiev, 2008). Scholars note also that the Greek myths concerning Thracians and the realities in Thrace are confused and confusing. Ancient authors generally showed more interest in myth and philosophy than in cult practice (Archibald, 1999: 427-469). The coupling of archaeological data with various forms of the imagination of Greek poets and philosophers is the usual interpretative frame practiced by the Bulgarian culture-historical approach. Therefore new criteria by which an indigenous Thracian tradition can be distinguished from the Greek imagined otherness of the Thracians.

Orpheus is a seminal figure used in constructing prestigious past. It is a well-known fact that national states on the Balkans emerging as a result of secession from the Ottoman Empire in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century used history as a preferred resource for nation building. In the search for origins and in order to forge collective identities through history (historical narrative) the newly emerged nations needed a past exclusively their own. In the process of sorting out one's own past and disentangling it from that of the others many ethnonyms, political formations, mythical figures as desirable components became ethnicized, i.e. they receive ethnic characteristics. This process requires the past to be recast and re-signified in order to fit the national(ist) expectations of pure ethnos with clear cut ethnic boundaries and territorial continuity. Thus the politics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have so impacted scholars that the political fragmentation on the Balkans has been re-inscribed in the ancient landscape. Different national narratives developed from one side in continuous historiographical battles with one another but from the other side modern Southeast European researchers studied, quoted, and even copied each other (Daskalov & Vezekov, 2015: 1-9).

The territories inhabited by the Thracians in antiquity are nowadays divided by multiple modern national states – primarily Romania, Bulgaria, Greek Thrace and Eastern Greek Macedonia, Turkish Thrace and also areas of northwestern Anatolia, parts of Serbia, the Republic of Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. In many of these countries the study of the Thracians is not of major national or ideological relevance. But in Romania and in Bulgaria the national ideologies are interested in the symbolic promotion of the Thracian cultural heritage as “ethnic” ancestry as the most valuable heritage in the management of origins. These studies are part of the search for “national specificity” as well as for proving the “autochthonous” character and historical “continuity” of these ethno-nations in the territories of the modern states. Therefore, a comparatively analyzed uses of antiquity of Romania and Bulgaria is inevitable.

#### 4. Inventing ancient ancestry: Romania

The above mentioned coupling of several ancient figures organized in groups reveal the fact that Romania and Bulgaria are the strongest candidates for promoting their ancientness as ancestral phenomenon. In these two countries scholars, writers, local experts in antiquity, political activists have created enormous amount of writings (Boia, 2010<sup>2</sup>; Marinov 2015). Among all national southeast ideologies the Romanian national discourse is challenged by Western scholars. The ancient roots of the Romanians were contested by E. R. Roesler (1871) as J. Fallmerayer (1835) challenged the ancient origin of the Greeks. These “Western attacks” activated the fabrication of “authenticity” and historical “continuity” of the Romanian ethno-nation in the territories of their modern state. The Greek scholars activated their *laographia*, but the Romanian historiography has shown the earliest and greatest interest in the symbolic promotion of ancient cultural heritage and its “ethnic” ancestry. About the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the search for ancient origins activated the “Latin” kinship and thus the problem of ancestry seemed clarified. Small is by that time the contribution of the “autochthonous” Dacians to the historical “continuity” of the Romanians and it is marked in the term “Dacian-Romanian synthesis”. This interpretation was launched by the so called “Latinist School” considered to be an extreme hair of the Transylvanian school active from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. By that time archaeological research and linguistic arguments are not still in the agenda of the continuity discourse on the space of Dacia and Rumania of today. The “furnishing” of this millennium turned into preferable topic of the scholars (Boia, 2010; Marinov, 2015).

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<sup>2</sup> The Bulgarian translation of Boia is used: Boia, L. (2010). *History and myth in Romanian consciousness*. Sofia: Kritika i Humanism.

The things changed after the publication of *Did the Dacians Perish* by B. Hasdeu (1860). Possessing an enormous fund of knowledge in the field of linguistics, philology and history, his “interdisciplinary” approach leads him to unexpected intellectual constructions. Practicing his intellectualism he produced in fact arbitrary, but seductive and therefore confusing inferences. His influence on the historical studies is enormous, but not in the sense of disciplining the scholarly field. His ideas became popular in the perceptions concerning the origin of the Romanians. He launched the notion of the role of the Dacians in the formation of the Romanian people which deepened the roots of the nation’s origin (Boia, 2010; Marinov, 2015).

The processes of professionalizing the field of history can be outlined in the 1880s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Romania. The newly educated scholars as N. Iorga appeared with their exacting methodology in the spirit of this time reorganizing the Romanian historiography. The change of the paradigm was realized by the well-known Junimea literary society active after 1860s. Its program tended to change the people’s attitudes towards the past. The members of this society were educated in the Western universities which followed the evolutionary concepts of the development of society and culture. Thus the German *Altertumswissenschaft* methodology based on objective studies of documentary data was beginning to become popular. The well-known Ranke’s formula turned into historiographic ideal of a “critical school” which tended to synchronize the Romanian and German scholarship. It supposed to reconstruct the history without political and ideological pressures. The critical approaches in the “new Junimea history” put the Latinism aside which was supposed to overcome the mythologies in the historical discourse from the 1870s on. So the study of facts became more precise but the main trajectory in the discourse remained the same. The critical spirit of these scholars however reflected in the historiographic culture of Romanian historical writing as it represented the contemporary paradigms of the Western scholarship in its evolutionary aspect (Boia, 2010: 57-66).

On the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a new trend in the nationalist orientation becomes visible. The focus is on the specificity of the Romanian culture and it triggered the autochthonism as national value. A book from the 1880s *Dacia before the Romans* (G. Tocilescu) turns to ancient sources rejecting the theories claiming the German/Gothic or Slavic ethnic belonging and asserted their Thracian character. From this time the Romanian scholarship treated the Getae and the Dacians as one and the same people. An important question appeared concerning the religion. It was in the context of wider discussions on Christian orthodoxy as one of the specificities of the Romanian people. Thus the alleged Getic “belief in immortality” associated with the figure of Zalmoxis mentioned for the first time by Herodotus (*Zalmoxis, Pythagoras and the Getae* (4.94-96) entered the space searching for specificity of the Romanian national character.

A voluminous work on *Prehistoric Dacia* written by an ethnologist and historian in 1913 (N. Densusianu) considered the geographic space of Romania as the cradle of a mighty pre-historian *Pelasgian empire* created about 6000 BC. It embraced Europe, Mediterranean region, North Africa (Egypt) and a greater part from Asia. Thus the Carpatho-Danubian region turns to be the motherland of all European and other civilizations. This megalomaniac genre is rejected later as chauvinist fantasy mainly by scholars as V. Parvan reappearing later by the beginning of the World War II in Romania and in the 1970s in Bulgaria.

The key figure in the interwar period is V. Parvan and his *Getica* from 1926 (The name *Getica* is used in the 1980s for a Bulgarian national program in Dobrudja). Educated in the spirit of the German *Altertumswissenschaft* he is the founder of the modern Romanian archaeological school. His methods of research combining archaeological and literary sources filtered through detailed interpretations lead to conclusions in accordance with the national-autochthonic ideology of the period. He introduces a basic distinction between Dacians and Getae from one side, and “south Thracians” from the other, in order to distinguish the Thracians known from the classical texts as drunkards, lazy and vicious people and with uncontrolled sexual behavior. As practitioners of Dionysus cult their image contradicted to the Romanian perception of the Getae as highly

spiritual “believers in immortality”. Parvan considers that the Getic/Dacian religion is ascetic and “aniconic” – a thesis that turns into *locus communis* in the Romanian scholarship and later in the Bulgarian. The Getic religion is also monotheistic and “uranic”, i.e. organized around a sky god which is the supreme god. The practicing of this type of cult is associated with the open air on mountaintops. Parvan’s work opened up the way to recognize the Thracians as ancestors of the Romanians, although the Geto-Dacians acquired the image of sober peasants, monogamous, highly moral and pious people. It contrasts to the “south Thracians” “denationalized” and “uprooted” by the foreign influences of the “chthonization” under the influence of the Mediterranean mentality (Marinov, 2015: 29). Unlike Geto-Dacians, the “south Thracians” were “chthonic” polytheists influenced by Mediterranean religious models and mentality. The Parvan’s Dacia and Romania are a wholeness, a “trans-historical” civilization whose religious, cultural, and moral specificities belong to the idealized autochthonic synthesis (Boia, 2010: 80).

In the 1930s however a methodological debate might be traced in the Romanian historiography which is indicative of establishment of various historical sensitivities. The question concerning politics and nationalism in historiography is debated in the context of the launched offensive of the “new historical school” against the “old school” presented mainly by N. Iorga and the *Historical Journal* issued by him. A group of young historians insist on methodology uncommitted to politics in the historical discourse. Notwithstanding the notions about the origins of the Romanians during this period they are unquestionably associated with the Dacians “*the oldest people in Europe; we are here; the Dacians are an elite people in antiquity praised by the father of history Herodotus; the Dacian religion and the invention that they are the bravest and most just of all Thracians make them evoke the Greek delight; they are the most ancient Christian people in southeast Europe; they are the only people in Europe with prolonged and uninterrupted political life from the foundation of their state even to this day*” (Boia, 2010: 84). In the context of the active by that time Legionary movement in Romania the discourses on the past produced constructions in the most autochthonic and nationalistic spirit.

##### 5. Inventing ancient ancestry: Bulgaria

In Bulgaria after the 1860s the civilization agenda does not include antiquity as a considerable resource for the nation-building project. The romantic nationalism produced a home-bred constructions (G. Rakovski’s writings and the forgery known as *Veda Slovena*) in which the figure of Orpheus only glimpsed without being included in any serious historical discourse of the remote past. The first scholarly analysis of the “Bulgarian Revival” realized by I. Shishmanov (1862-1928) specifies a lack of antiquity as integral part of the “national narrative” (Daskalov, 2013: 47). The period between World War I and World War II is marked by the traumatic events of the “two national catastrophes” as the Bulgarian historiography defines them. The needed national integration is difficult as it lacks a strong international patron or historiographical movements comparable to the “Latin kinship” or “Daco-Roman synthesis” of the Romanians (philhellenism for the Greeks). It is required then an intellectual mobilization seeking a new perception of history. It appeared something more important – how to transmit this knowledge to the people and to imbed it in a way that they would feel to belong to a “national” culture. Thus the question of how the historical narrative has to reach a total indigenization in order to shape the community becomes crucial.

About the 1920s several tendencies in this direction can be traced to fill the lack of antiquity. From one side, influential studies on antiquity appeared in the process of the institutionalization of the “national sciences” shaping the Bulgarian historical canon. The unquestioned culture-historical approach with evolutionist methodology and its concomitant doctrines of cultural survivalism was based firmly on positivist grounds. Lacks of any attempts during this time and later also to undermine this framework ensure its long existence till nowadays

in Bulgaria. From another side, the characterological rhetoric as part of Bulgarian national discourse began to focus on folk customs as a depository of the “national spirit”. Another important trend has also to be noted. Considering German and French paradigms it appeared a more “scientific” and “theorizing” on national identity known as psychology of the peoples (*narodopsychologia*). This term is still usable in the Bulgarian academia without clarifying the context of its appearance and the purpose of its use. It imagines the nation in outdated evolutionary terms as organic whole with physical and spiritual characteristics re-creating constantly in time and space. Thus a discourse on “national specificity” and its resistance in time was gaining centrality in the intellectual circles.

The professionalization and institutionalization of the Bulgarian *Altertumswissenschaft* owes much to a number of scholars, but the focus must be stressed on G. Katsarov and B. Filov to mention only a few. G. Katsarov’s expertise was in almost all fields of Thracian studies and constructed influential interpretations on problems of geography, political history, and religious studies. They lack an explicit theoretical reasoning about the interpretations of Thracian “ancestry”, but it becomes implicitly clear the typical for the positivist scholarly approach and the caution with which the topic is treated. The study of facts became more precise as the concerns are centered on the positivist notion that more precisely collected data means more knowledge. Katsarov’s conception in the quest for Thracian “ancestry” evaluated in the context of the publications of foreign scholars who insisted on the Thracian heritage in the Bulgarian traditions. Katsarov began to launch the idea that the Orphic doctrine of transmigration of souls has influenced that of the Greek Pythagoreans. Thus gradually the Thracians began to emerge as ancestors with original culture and religion which left its imprint on Bulgarian traditions. Katsarov changed the status of the Thracian culture from “barbaric” to “archaic”. Identical search for “archaic features” was underway in the studies of Bulgarian folk culture. The folklore studies conducted by M. Arnaudov through a prolonged and profound ethnographic practice were presented in voluminous publications. They stayed however away from the obsession with Thracian rooting examining broader geographical contexts in the vein of the *Altertumswissenschaft* scholarship.

Katsarov touched also on the “furnishing” of the Bronze Age with “Thracian-Mycenaean cultural unity” and believed that in Thrace the Mycenaean influence existed down to the classical times. Katsarov added the “Thracio-Phrygians” with their mystic and orgiastic cults that also have influenced the Greeks. Nevertheless, Katsarov did not deny the Greek impact over Thracians in favor of absolutization of the Thracian uniqueness. In the context of the then *Altertumswissenschaft* he established a scholarly analysis of the ancient texts based on his classicist expertise. He inserted basic knowledge on Thrace and the Thracians in the encyclopedic corpuses typical for the time. He collected and published also in a corpus all known items of the so-called Thracian Horseman. (Marinov, 2015: 81-84; Lazova, 2016: 150-159)

B. Filov professionalized the field of archaeology. He isolated Thracian art as much differing from the Greek stylistic. Filov conducted excavations and expeditions which lay particular stress on the archaeological research in the territories of Dobrudja, Macedonia, along the Aegean Sea. This research followed the imagined boundaries of Greater Bulgaria. He elucidated also Thracian-Mycenaean relations which were studied in the context of the European *Altertumswissenschaft*. Later when “Mycenaenizing” was critically approached the institutionalized in the 1970-s Bulgarian Thracology organized an international congress in Rotterdam on the topic of Thracio-Mycenaean relations. (Marinov, 2015: 83-85; Lazova, 2016: 150-159)

Another influential trend following the willingness to identify “specific national traits” is constructed in the point of intersection of the psychology of the peoples (*narodopsychologia*) and “national ontology” emerging from the mainstream of “official nationalist” ideological camp. It followed more radically their anti-modernism repudiating the values considered to be imposed

by the West. In this vein is Sheytanov's compromise which takes possession of Western scholars considering some figures of ancient texts as Thracian. He is placing them in the geographical and temporal context of the Balkans defining thus the Bulgarian-ness. N. Sheytanov is the loudest voice among a number of intellectuals who as counterpart of Romanian figures as L. Blaga, M. Eliade etc. are striving to produce an ontological scheme based on the specificity of their nations. Sheytanov's project of "national ontology" was based on his mysticism which from personal aptitude gradually evaluated into nation-building ideology (Trencsenyi, 2007). The modernization processes are considered to be a tragic split undermining the coherence of the nation. Therefore Sheytanov's attempt is to project this coherence entirely on symbolic-metaphorical tropes in searching for the primordial of the national self. He followed the linearity of the historical sequence posing it in a geographical space of the Balkans as the principal meeting point of the four geographic directions – a kind of *axis mundi*: "a focus of world history", "a bridge between three continents". Thus he mobilized the geographical and temporal aspects of defining Bulgarian-ness in terms of a program of "internal identity building" rather than a program of territorial expansion.

The "Great-Bulgarian worldview", according to Sheytanov, was supposed to function on the Balkans, on the three historical regions of Bulgarian-ness Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia, which harmonically fit into the unitary national type. This ethnic mixture is based on pre-historic and ancient space where the inhabitants are Balkano-Bulgarians and thus autochthonizing history and geography in mobilizing the "national ontology". Moreover, the "Great-Bulgarian worldview" is supposed to function as a religious system defining the Bulgarians as an "elect nation" and the Balkans as the "holy land of Europe" (Trencsenyi, 2007).

Thus some Balkan figures as Orpheus (and Dionysus) began to play a prominent role as archetypal and ancestral divinities even if mythical. On the basis of Western scholarship from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Heuzey, Rode, Perdrize), an alleged Thracian "belief in immortality" was associated with Dionysus, Orpheus, or Zalmoxis. They were based on specific reading of the scattered in various Greek authors' information and steadily rooted in Sheytanov's Balkano-Bulgarian space legitimizing it as territory of "national essence". They are included in the continual development of the Bulgarians beginning with the cult of Dionysus associated with Orpheus and Zalmoxis entering the medieval Bogomils movement in Bulgaria, and ending in the Bulgarian 19<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance. The mythological tropes of vegetative god resurrected in a human body or the "tragic titanism" in Orphic mythology, centered on the myth of dismemberment of the young Dionysus-Zagreus by the Titans, started to play the fundamental underlying principal in Sheytanov's metaphysical construction. These archetypal figures and their mythology are equalized to Christ resurrection. It was stated that Thrace was homeland of a particular doctrine of immortality – Orphic doctrine of transmigration of souls that had influenced the Greek Pythagoreanism. Thus the figure of Orpheus and its mythology entered the national space and gradually wins the centrality in the "grand national narrative". According to Sheytanov, it was not Palestine, but the "religion-creating" Balkans together with the Thracio-Phrygian Asia Minor that made the Christian world. His aim was to construct the "national essence" of the Bulgarians and thus to make them value their own past as *the bread and the salt* in their everyday life. He contributed for this understanding writing textbooks on Bulgarian history prefaced by the Prime minister and archaeologist B. Filov. There it was stressed on the conventional Slavic/Proto-Bulgarian ethnogenesis totally excluding the Thracians. Sheytanov proposed however to be created a special field of study which he called "Trakistics". Through imbedding these mythological figures in the school education, the attempts at total indigenization of these mythical figures marked a great progress. Its full realization will be achieved during the 1970s, 1980s and later through their institutionalization by the communist regime. It is rightly noted that most of the attempts at undermining this framework of historical narrativity and the corresponding national characterology remained rather idiosyncratic (Trenchenyi, 2007). It becomes visible through the social life of Orpheus during the late socialism in Bulgaria.

## 6. The “new” rhetoric after the 1940s: Advent of Soviet ethnogenesis

After 1945 the Slavs were imposed as legitimate “ancestors” of the Romanians and the Bulgarians. In the period following archaeologists were obliged to discover sites proving Slavic presence on the territory of modern countries. In Bulgaria, the transition to promoting the Slavs as the “right” ancestors was smoother as the national ideology has Slavic base and the Slavic references never disappeared (Iliev, 1998). About the end of the 1950s the mechanisms of producing knowledge about the past changed. The Bulgarian communism as in many other countries resigned the “internationalism” and came back with “new” rhetoric to the national values concentrated mainly on origins of the Bulgarians and the continuity of the Bulgarian culture. This specific characteristic of historical research was influenced mainly by the Soviet theory of ethnogenesis (Lazova, 2015: 185-208). Methodologically it re-activated the symbiosis of the romantic ideas and the positivistic approaches of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, typical for the culture-historical approach focusing on ethnicity which never left the Bulgarian studies of the past.

The “liberalization” of the historical discourse was however limited and controlled. After post-Stalinist period in Romanian and in Bulgarian contexts the national mission of the historical and archaeological studies were beginning to be restored. In Romania the interest towards the “Daco-Roman synthesis” has been fully revived. It was up to archaeology, history and linguistics to find “indispensable” proof of the continuity of the “Daco-Romans” and the Thracians on the present territory of the two states. The official state politics in Romania and in Bulgaria gravitated to autochthonism with the specific differences which characterize the “national spirituality” and the moral values imbedded in the attitudes of mind. During the communist regime after 1960s in both countries a dominant doctrine and its rhetoric became extremely “patriotic” in search for origins, in order to be compensated the contemporary problems. It is in this vein that the Bulgarian historians canonized the Thracians as ethnic “ancestors” of the Bulgarians and part of the Bulgarian ethnogenesis. Thus they received the status of being “autochthonous”. Gradually during the 1960s, and with much greater intensity and in the 1970s and 1980s, almost everything from the ideological arsenal of the previous “bourgeois nationalism” was reused and turned into usable past. Two forthcoming events triggered large-scaled institutionalization and research with lavish state sponsoring. It was in the context of two anniversaries that a revitalizing of the ancient imageries of Dacian and Thracian pasts as ancestral became the dominant trend. In Romania it was celebrated 2050 years since the creation of the first centralized and independent Dacian state and in Bulgaria it was celebrated 1300 years since the creation of the Bulgarian state.

The institutionalization of the Thracian studies in Bulgaria called Thracology is in accordance with Sheytanov’s idea from the 1930s to be institutionalized a *Trakistika* (Thracian studies). It was supposed to be established a “complex” research project of the Thracians concentrated in the Institute of Thracology (1972) and in a specialized section of Thracian archaeology in the Archaeological Institute with Museum (1983). Both institutions were supposed to identify the Thracian culture as a distinct historical phenomenon fabricated exclusively from ancient classical texts supported with archaeological data. Thus the Bulgarian archaeology was gradually becoming Thracian, in distinction from the so-called ancient archaeology. The configuration of a dominant ideological and in some sense the only one discourse is beginning to organize all studies on antiquity. The new ideological propaganda began to prefer easy and simplistic interpretations in service of a nationalist agenda instead of developing complicated studies of mutual interaction of ancient cultures on the Balkans (Slavova 2017: 396-410). The new “Thracological” interpretations were framed by various periodicals opened to foreign partners obtaining thus an approval from abroad instead of approaching and applying new paradigms. The forum for international scholarship became the International Congress of Thracology, a number of conferences became also international. This was the time when intensive export of the “Thracian Gold” began. These international relations were controlled in a way that it was possible to pass

over the central discourse, but it was not possible to replace it by other reasonable contemporary one. Moreover, this was the time of great changes in the paradigms of history and their cooperation with social sciences. They opposed the political, ideological and nationalistic reshaping of the past. Following however Soviet scholars, Bulgarian scholarship strongly focused on ethnogenetic issues and began to intensify a discourse of the uniqueness of the Thracian culture. Despite Marxist ideological regime, Bulgarian Thracology demonstrated a special inclination for “royal” and “aristocratic” cults and ideologies of the “elite”. It was probably an effort to overcome the deficiency of aristocratism of the ruling then communist elite.

An important archaeological discovery in 1950s and 1960s of an ancient city of Seuthopolis (the city of king Seuthes III) interpreted as royal residence triggered a study on distinctiveness of the Thracian society and culture. The royal-ness requires shaping it through various data therefore important monographs outlined key trends for the future research (Fol, 1972, 1975). One of them focused on the political history of Thrace attacking the pro-Greek position of the European classical scholarship, which underestimated the role of Thrace as political factor in the Mediterranean. The other one outlined the broad context in which the Thracian culture is realized – the paleo-Balkan heritage of Southeastern Europe. It had already being in the focus of the above mentioned voluminous work *Prehistoric Dacia* (1913) which imagined the geographical space of Romania as the cradle of a mighty pre-historian *Pelasgian Empire* created about 6 000 BC.

By that time, a great amount of studies on Orpheus (Dionysus) had been produced and Western influences were visible mainly in Romanian scholarship. An important figure which triggered the revitalizing of the interwar imagery of Thracian culture and its “sublime spirituality” is Ioan Coman – theologian and classical philologist close to the Iron Guard from the 1930s in Romania, but easily accommodated to the communist regime because of gratifying the communist “patriotic” impetus. Some of Coman’s works were published in Bulgaria which might be supposed to help shaping the Bulgarian Thracological interpretations (study on Zalmoxis and Orpheus in particular). Thus Orpheus enters convincingly the Bulgarian academic space after the national romanticism that forged a compilation of popular songs from the Rhodope Mountains (*Veda Slovena* 1874/1881) and N. Sheitanov’s megalomaniac version of the official Bulgarian nationalism from the interwar period. Through Coman’s works (1950, 1958) Zalmoxis and Orpheus gain an exceptional spiritual role in European history – they promoted cultural values “among Thracians, Greeks and to a certain extent among all Europeans”. Coman saw however the figure of Orpheus as secondary to Zalmoxis who was the more ancient and the more brilliant. Orpheus was only a missionary of Zalmoxis. A big question appeared – was the religion of Zalmoxis Orphic or was the Orphic doctrine Zalmoxian – the Getae, the people of Zalmoxis, are spiritually and morally superior to other Thracians. In 1958 another publication appeared, again in Bulgaria, where Ioan Coman identified Zalmoxis with Christ (Marinov, 2015: 36).

Both Thracologies – Romanian and Bulgarian – active during the 1970s and 1980s, interpreting the Geto-Dacian and Thracian spirituality and its historical continuity, could not be fully understood without taking into account the massive influence of the historian of religions M. Eliade. His intellectual heritage and its influence on many academic fields is a separate topic. Eliade’s methodological eclecticism influenced also the Bulgarian approach in revealing the distinctiveness of the Thracian Orpheus and Orphism (Marinov, 2015: 38-43). A configuration of Thracian Orphism might be considered as the answer of the Bulgarian scholarship to the secondary position of Orpheus proposed by J. Coman. It might be noted that M. Eliade edited about the end of the 1930s a journal bearing the title *Zalmoxis* and in the 1990s the Bulgarian Thracology established a journal on Thracian studies bearing the title *Orpheus*. The importance however of Romanian contribution to the study of ancient peoples and their role in the national projects is acknowledged (or it couldn’t be neglected) by the fact that the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress in Thracology was held in Bucharest in 1976. On this 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of

Thracology every participant in the Congress received the book written by J. C. Dragan (1917-2008). He is a self-made scholar and businessman representing in full scale the ideological evolution of Romanian nationalist factors developed in the communist discourse in historiography. He openly held fascist beliefs before the World War II, but was received many times by N. Chaushescu. He is considered to be the key figure in reviving the Thracomaniac obsession of the past (Marinov, 44-45). His writings are tracing the boundaries of grandiose ancient Thracian space with “multimillenary history” (Dragan, 1976). Still then Dragan’s writings put the question how to draw a line between ideology which produces symbolic ideological meanings for sale and the epistemology. Many scholars questioned this type of writings about past and noted the difficulties to distinguish between professional scholarship and the “grand narratives” fabricated by “grand theories”. Dragan’s foundation sponsored publishing houses, print and electronic media, private university; lavishly sponsored a number of Thracological symposia in Italy and Spain. The 6<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Thracology was held under the auspices of the Dragan European Foundation in Palma de Mallorca in 1992, whose topic was Europa-Indoeuropea. One of his books is published by the Sofia University press with approving forward by Al. Fol (Dragan, 1992).

Thus under strong influences of Romanian scholarship the “Orphic” question began to occupy the academic space framed by the research field of Thracology and in 1986 it was produced the theory of *Thracian Orphism* (Fol, 1986). It became the trademark of the Bulgarian Thracology. The main focus was on ethnically defined culture which differed from the polis-structured Greek world. The royal-ness of Thracian society recognized as a distinctive feature of the Thracian-ness requires to be constructed an ideology, in order to be explained the archaeological evidence discovered both in the past and the newly found archaeological data. Thracian society has been imagined as a centralized territorial monarchy on which an aristocratic “ideology” dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. was developed and was orally transmitted. This society had the chance to remain non-literary and thus the aristocratic elite of the closed society accessible only to initiates was able to transmit the values of the community. This Orphism preceded the Greek one by centuries, as it was an ideology of the “Thraco-Pelasgian community”; this paleo-Balkan oral doctrine preceded the Trojan War. Greek Orphism and Pythagoreanism represented denatured later versions of it. Thus it differs totally from the Greek “classical world”. This aristocratic ideology was “coded” and can be “deciphered” practically in variety of data – megaliths, art, settlements, with their population and religion, tombs, folklore, etc. (see more details of the machinery of Thracian Orphism in: Marinov, 2015: 104, footnote 320).

Considering the permanent tension between facts and interpretations which reach us as various cultural representations, a curious fact however still remains – the version of the Thracian Orphism of Bulgarian Thracology does not rely on a single written testimony confirming its existence. Many scholars even doubt the Greek Orphism. Moreover, as it was already mentioned, the figure of Orpheus itself does not appear in any “domestic” epigraphical and iconic monuments. It has to be noted also that all the main notions used in the construction of the Thracian Orphism of the Bulgarian Thracology have been criticized from the field which they have been taken – initiation, the notion of mysteries and its applicability to non-Greek contexts; solar, chthonic divinities are already emptied of meaning; Apollonian, Dionysian are anachronistic. Nevertheless, a great number of archaeological data are deciphered through this very key of the “Thracian Orphism” of the Bulgarian Thracology. They produced narratives about Orpheus and his Thracian-ness and their reification turned them into “*the bread and the salt of the Bulgarian today*” – the Sheitanov’s prewar appeal from the 1930s is accomplished. The banalized nationalisms operate now with popular ancient imagery making the nation unforgettable taking it for granted (Billig, 2005); thus the narrative concentrates on the territory of the of the present-day nation recognizing “Bulgarian (Romanian) lands in antiquity” – a notion re-produced by schoolbooks, university and museum departments, etc. The valuable past attracted the popular

obsession mainly with the deep ethnic roots of origins and the “ownership” over this brilliant remote past.

#### 7. The “sacred land of Orpheus”: Local contexts, imbedded identities

The “grand narrative” of antiquity inserted the figure of Orpheus as important part of the national history. The figure of Orpheus turned into specific symbol of the Bulgarian landscape embedding particular ideas of Bulgarian’s Thracian origin which fuelled intensively the Bulgarian poetry from the 1980s on (Sirakova, 2017: 423-436). It triggered also the local expertise of Orpheus which was organized in immense book and film production. The “Orphic” interpretation colors the general popular assumption of the Bulgarian remote past. It disseminated the greatness of Orpheus as a figure indispensable for the life of the whole world – he is a historical personality, born in the Rhodope Mountains with achievements in many fields. The tourist industry very easily names different places as “Orpheus cave”, films produced in great variety “the mysteries of Orpheus”, “Orphic schools” performed “authentic” songs etc. (Lazova, 2016: 281-294).

Since the 1960s the canonization of the Thracians as ancestors of the Bulgarians activated the use of Orpheus imagery. Among the multitude of “Orphic” designed values only few would be mentioned. The city of Smolyan in the Rhodope Mountains organized out of three small villages in the 1960s had to receive its emblem. It was produced in the 1970s where the traditional form of medieval shield is replaced with the Orphic lyre, as a result of the activism of the local expert on Orpheus imagery. The fabricated values function as municipality emblem. Since 1960s the canonization of the Thracians as ancestors of the Bulgarians activated the “biography” of Orpheus imagery. The city of Smolyan received its emblem produced in the 1970s where the traditional form of medieval shield is replaced with Orphic lyre. It is due to the activism in promoting the figure of Orpheus on the basis of local expertise.



Figure 1. The Lyre of Orpheus as a municipality emblem of the city of Smolyan in the Rhodope Mountains

The imbedded Thracian ancestry of the Bulgarians motivated an artist’s inspiration who states that “Orpheus is Thracian which *automatically* refers to us – the Bulgarians”.



Figure 2. The legendary figures of Orpheus and Euridice are monumentalized in the city center of the city of Smolyan in the Rhodope Mountains

A public figure (the mayor) unveiling the monument of Orpheus near Kirdjali in the Rhodope Mountains remarks that this region is associated with the “birth, life and works of Orpheus”.



Figure 3. Orpheus monument on the way to Kirdjali in the Rhodope Mountains



Figure 4. The “sacred land of Orpheus” keeps his grave in the Rhodope Mountain



Figure 5. Orpheus monument meets the passengers on the Sofia airport.

Constructing the space of the Rhodope Mountains through emblems, images, places etc., the discourse both in academic and local setting, achieves homogenization of the ethnic diversity not only of the Rhodope region, but in the national space. It however reveals a tendency of capsulation of a truth that “Orpheus is unjustly separated and appropriated by foreign interests as he is pure Bulgarian legendary leader”. A popular discourse was born accusing the Greeks of taking away of Orpheus from “us”, the Bulgarians. On two occasions – in 2005 and 2008 – the Bulgarian media alerted their audience that the Greeks (Greek tour operators) were trying to appropriate Orpheus. In response, Bulgarian tour operators presented their country at a tourist

exhibition in Switzerland with the slogan “the sacred land of Orpheus” while the village of Gela in the Bulgarian part of Rhodope mountains proclaimed itself “the birthplace of Orpheus”. “We” do not give “our” Orpheus to the Greeks: “the social drama” arises out of groups, committed to common history, sharing common values or interests<sup>3</sup>.

## 8. Conclusion

This text discusses questions of how the knowledge constructed by academics is transformed into popular knowledge through processes of embedding it in everyday life and integrating it into people’s consciousness. This process of nationalizing and commodifying the past by the state nationalist politics does not allow the academics to participate in the contemporary debates concerning the studies of antiquity in general. Enlarging the reflexivity in academic fields is supposed to open up a space for discussing contemporary methods and practices in order to outline more clear boundaries between science, society and ideology.

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